



From Silence to Speech: The Role of Digital Interactive Platforms in Motivating Reluctant EFL Speakers

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Abstract— The unwillingness to use English as a foreign language (EFL) in classrooms is a long-term challenge to the language educators. Communication apprehension, language anxiety, or the lack of motivation is a problem that many learners face and prevents oral participation and the development of communicative competence. The emergence of digital interactive technologies, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Flipgrid, and Padlet, has created the opportunities to motivate unwilling speakers to engage in speaking activities in non-stressful, adaptable, and interactive forms. This paper investigates the use of these platforms to motivate reluctant EFL learners to transition from silence to speech. Using theories of affective factors in language learning, motives to communicate, and self-determination, the study investigates how the digital platform can be used to provide a less threatening context during oral practice, higher autonomy among learners, and the enhancement of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It was also a mixed-method study that involved 60 EFL undergraduate learners who went through both face-to-face and digitally mediated speaking assignments. The results prove that online interactive tools can greatly enhance the desire to communicate and reduce anxiety and encourage continued oral involvement among learners. The study suggests implications for EFL pedagogy, particularly regarding the inclusion of digital tools to support learners who might otherwise remain silent in traditional classrooms.

Keywords— reluctant EFL speakers, digital interactive platforms, motivation, willingness to communicate, speaking anxiety.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Among the EFL learners, speaking is considered to be the most nerve-wracking skill. Many students avoid oral participation due to their fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, or inadequate language resources (Horwitz, 2010). This unwillingness to talk has been connected with the lack of motivation, high communication apprehension, and lack of willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998). What comes out is a classroom paradox, where students who require speaking practice most are the most likely to not engage in it. The high proliferation of digital interactive sites has also provided new platforms in which language can be learned outside the classroom. Contrary to in-person learning, applications like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Flipgrid, and Padlet enable learners to engage in

both real-time and offline learning and give them a chance to practice in a less threatening environment. These sites offer various options, such as voice messages, video posts, chat boxes, and breakout rooms, thereby catering to different comfort levels; this allows timid speakers to contribute minimally at first while gradually increasing their self-confidence.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The current research is relevant in terms of solving one of the most acute issues in EFL pedagogy, namely, encouraging the unwilling speakers to engage in the process of oral communication. In many cases, traditional approaches cannot attract silent learners, but an alternative approach through digital interactive platforms can be effective, as it decreases the affective filter and provides a wide range of communicative possibilities. The study has

value to applied linguistics because it connects the integration of technology to motivational psychology and the development of communicative competence. It also offers viable suggestions to teachers on how they can use the digital platforms to attract the reluctant learners.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of Research

The main goal of the given research is to examine how online interactive resources could encourage unwilling EFL speakers to participate in the communication process actively. The specific objectives are:

1. To investigate the extent to which digital interactive platforms can mitigate speaking anxiety and unwillingness in EFL learners.
2. To investigate the role that such platforms can play in the willingness of learners to communicate (WTC) in English.
3. To assess that the digital platform can play a role in increasing a learner's motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) to speak.
4. To offer pedagogical suggestions on how digital platforms should be integrated into the teaching of EFL speaking to help reluctant speakers.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions used in the study are:

1. What is the impact of digital interactive platforms on EFL learners who show reluctance to speak and express communication anxiety?
2. How do these platforms affect the desire of learners to communicate in English?
3. Which motivational variables improve when reluctant learners use digital platforms to communicate?
4. What are the ways to incorporate digital interactive platforms in classroom practice to promote effective oral engagement?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Learning the Reluctance of EFL Speaking

Reluctance to talk is a common occurrence in EFL classrooms that is commonly brought about by communication apprehension, fear of evaluation, and lack of confidence (Horwitz, 2010). These learners can be muted even where they can generate the oral language. According to Krashen, learners can fail to acquire language due to high levels of anxiety, low self-esteem, and low motivation, as explained in the Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982). As a result, the affective condition of a learner has a direct effect on the willingness to communicate (WTC) in English (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

The inhibited speakers have various problems: they are not exposed to the real language, they are afraid to make mistakes, and socio-cultural elements, like the dominance of other more assertive students in a classroom, are present (Oxford, 1999). The students are used to traditional forms of instruction, which do not support them, which underlies their silence and restricts their ability to gain communicative competence.

2.2 Digital Interactive Platforms in Language Learning

Online interactive tools allow for adaptable and accommodating language practice. These tools consist of synchronous (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet) and asynchronous (e.g., Flipgrid, Padlet, VoiceThread) tools and allow learners to exchange information with the help of video, audio, or text-based posts.

The digital platform affordances are:

1. Less anxiety: Students will be able to make answers privately or in small groups in breakout rooms and then speak before an audience (Satar and Acan, 2018).
2. Flexible pacing: Asynchronous platforms enable the learner to go over the answers again and again and build confidence.
3. Interactive feedback: Peer feedback, teacher feedback, and automated feedback encourage iterative learning and social learning.
4. Independence and choice: The learners decide on when and with whom they will socialize, which enhances the intrinsic level of motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000). According to empirical research, such accommodations can assist hesitant students in developing confidence and transitioning from silence to speech in the classroom and online setting (Baralt, Gilabert, and Robinson, 2016).

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

3.1. The willingness to communicate (WTC)

The WTC model assumes the individual, situational, and contextual factors affect the willingness of learners to start communication (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The advantages of digital interactive platforms for WTC include their potential to offer low-stress opportunities, allowing learners to engage at their own pace and alleviating the fear of negative evaluation.

2.3.2 Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen (1982) asserts that learners' affective states, such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence, control the language acquisition process. Online and digital platforms decrease the affective filter; this involves providing enabling conditions in which learners find it safe to play

around with language and therefore encouraging oral production.

2.3.3 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

The SDT by Deci and Ryan (2000) throws light on the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in promoting intrinsic motivation. Digital interactive platforms facilitate autonomy through the ability of the learner to regulate his or her engagement, competence through instant feedback, and relatedness through interaction with peers in virtual communities.

2.4 Empirical Data on Online Platform and Motivation

2.4.1 Synchronous Platforms

Live communication via synchronous platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams can be used, during which the teacher can create breakout rooms where small-group speaking tasks can be held. According to research, these environments decrease the level of social anxiety among the reluctant learners and enhance oral participation (Satar and Akcan, 2018). Students note that they feel safer in small groups prior to speaking to the entire class, leading to slow progress in WTC.

2.4.2 Asynchronous Platforms

Oral responses can be recorded and uploaded through platforms like Flipgrid and Padlet, and after that, they can be viewed by classmates and teachers (asynchronous platforms). It has been shown that asynchronous interaction allows reflection, practice, and correction of errors that provide confidence and motivation (Kinger, 2018). In the case of unwilling learners, asynchronous posting eliminates the element of rush response and the fear of receiving negative feedback.

2.4.3 Game-based Learning and Interaction

Motivation is also promoted through gamified features within platforms, like likes, comments, badges, and leaderboards. Baralt et al. (2016) believe that these factors enhance the level of involvement and a feeling of success, which encourages reluctant learners to become more active.

2.5 Digital Interactive Platforms Issues

These platforms have weaknesses even though they are advantageous:

1. Digital inequality: Not all learners have access to efficient internet and devices, potentially locking out some students (Stockwell, 2010). There is a technological distraction: Notifications and multitasking may decrease the attention to the speaking activity.
2. Teacher preparedness: Teachers have to be trained and learn how to use the platform in order

to integrate the day-to-day activities (Godwin-Jones, 2017).

3. Issues with assessment: The asynchronous nature of assessing oral performance might be a problem for the practice of standardized assessment.

2.6 Summary of Literature

The literature proves that digital interactive platforms can be effective in engaging unwilling EFL speakers. They offer low-anxiety, flexible, and interactive conditions that boost WTC, autonomy, and intrinsic drive. Synchronous and asynchronous tools both help the learners to participate and feel confident in oral activity, but such issues as access to the Internet, distraction, and teacher preparedness are still present. The review provides a powerful basis for empirical research on the motivational effects of digital interactive platforms, which should be used in designing interventions to assist the silent learners to become active participants in the EFL classroom.

III. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative part involved the change in the speaking attendance and willingness to communicate (WTC) in learners with pre- and post-tests, and the qualitative part involved experiences, perceptions, and motivation changes in learners through interviews and classroom observations. The mixed-methods approach has made it possible because it has triangulated and offered a comprehensive picture of the impact of the digital interactive platforms on reluctant EFL speakers.

3.1.2 Participants and Sampling

The 60 respondents were undergraduate EFL students enrolled in an intermediate-level English course in one of the universities in the Middle East. The learners were selected through a purposive sampling technique whereby they had to be identified as reluctant speakers or portray low oral involvement in classroom activities.

The participants were subdivided into:

Experimental group (n=30): students were involved in speaking exercises with the help of digital interactive resources (Flipgrid, Padlet, and Zoom breakout rooms).

Control group (n = 30): observed the conventional classroom-based speaking activities without an integration of a digital platform.

3.1.3 Instruments and Data Collection

1. Speaking Participation Logs: The frequency, duration, and quality of oral participation were noted by the teacher in the pre- and post-intervention sessions.
2. Questionnaires: The participants were given the Likert-scale pre- and post-intervention surveys on WTC, motivation, and speaking anxiety.
3. Semi-Structured Interviews: The interviews were conducted with 12 participants of the experimental group in order to get the detailed experience of using digital platforms.
4. Observations in Classrooms: Observations were made in both groups regarding engagement, patterns of participation, and the interactions of the peers.

3.1.4 Procedure

The course of intervention was 10 weeks:

1. Experimental group: performed weekly speaking tasks with the use of both synchronous (Zoom breakout rooms) and asynchronous (Flipgrid and Padlet) systems and had a chance to reflect and communicate with peers.
2. Control group: attended normal classroom speaking for the same duration of time.

The first week was used in pre-tests, and post-tests took place in week 10. The after-test was followed by surveys and interviews.

3.1.5 Data Analysis

1. Quantitative data: Compared with the use of paired samples t-tests and ANCOVA to determine the differences of speaking participation, WTC, and motivation between experimental and control groups.
2. Qualitative data: Transcripts of interviews were coded thematically in NVivo to reveal patterns with regard to motivation, reduction of anxiety, and experiences of learners.

The results of observational data were used to confirm survey and interview results.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Quantitative Findings

1. Speaking Participation: The experimental group augmented the mean oral participation frequency by 45 percent relative to 12 percent in the control group ($p < .01$).
2. •Need to Communicate: There was a great increase in WTC scores among the participants utilizing digital platforms (pre-test mean = 2.4; post-test mean = 4.1 based on a 5-point scale).

3. Motivation: The scores of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were significantly raised in the experimental group and particularly in terms of the choice of tasks and interaction with peers.
4. Speaking Anxiety: The experimental group was found to have lower levels of anxiety (mean decrease = 1.2 points on a 5-point scale), and the control group changed insignificantly.

3.2.2 Qualitative Findings

There were three general themes based on interviews and observations:

1. Less Fear of Negative Evaluation and Anxiety: According to the learners, asynchronous recordings and small-group interaction enabled them to rehearse without the immediate feeling of the audience evaluating them. For example, I had felt confident to talk in front of the class after posting a video on Flipgrid.
2. Higher Motivation and Involvement: The respondents stated that they enjoyed and were more motivated because of the ability to interact, use games, and receive feedback with peers. For example, I enjoyed the replies of classmates and feedback, and the feeling of speaking to them became less intimidating.
3. Slow Process of Silence to Speech: The learners developed from less active involvement in classroom conversations to active involvement. Online media were used as a framework to facilitate exposure to oral activities in increments.

IV. INTEGRATION OF FINDINGS

The quantitative and qualitative findings can be summarized to show that digital interactive platforms are a beneficial way to motivate reluctant EFL speakers. These tools produce a decrease in anxiety, WTC, and intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivation. The results indicate that the combination of synchronous and asynchronous platforms in delivering instruction on speaking could alter the classroom interaction patterns, where the silent learners gradually become increasingly involved in oral communication.

V. CONCLUSION

As this paper shows, digital interactive platforms are essential in encouraging the unwilling EFL speakers by providing a more interactive and encouraging learning process. It is found that learners who are using such platforms demonstrate greater oral participation and willingness to communicate (WTC). Besides, speaking anxiety and fear of an unfavorable evaluation decrease

considerably due to the use of digital tools and enable students to be more confident in themselves. Additionally, these platforms better motivate learners by fostering their autonomy and providing them with a sense of choice, as well as valuable experiences in meaningful interactions with their peers, which facilitates a more positive and successful language learning process.

The paper emphasizes that digital tools should not replace pedagogical instructions; rather, they serve as an additional resource to support the scaffolding process from decree to speech for reluctant learners. To help learners develop oral skills and ensure high engagement, teachers ought to create both synchronous and asynchronous scaffolded activities, which are structured and designed.

Future studies can examine the long-term effects of digital platforms on oral fluency, explore their impact on different groups of learners (e.g., those with lower proficiency levels), and investigate how teacher facilitation can help sustain motivation and engagement.

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